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Welcome to Book Two!

[image]

Hello my wonderful noodles, and welcome to the second book in my Rise of the Weather series! If you are new here and have not read the first book in the series, *please,* go do so now! Otherwise, you'll be walking in blindly and have no clue what's even going on. Ahem, anyways. If you have read the previous book, I welcome you to our new establishment in the RotW series. As you could probably tell from book one, there's gonna be some more action here! So buckle your seat belts and prepare, cause this is gonna get spicy!

So a few notes before we begin, I'd like to assure you that commenting and voting are very much appreciated! Doing so encourages me to write more and update faster, bringing you all the content you deserve. I love hearing the feedback you have to give about my chapters, and it just makes me so motivated when I know people are enjoying my book. I want to get this book completed just as much as you do...so...aside from that, please enjoy!
~ Kitt

(Image shown is the cover to book one.)

Keep in mind that if I feel necessary, I will make changes to already published chapters. Major editing will occur at times if things don't seem to pull together correctly. Be sure to check every update you get on this book, even if it's a chapter you've already read, because if there's an update there's bound to be a change. Thank you! <3

Prologue

[image]

A black tabby tom approached a swirling pool of water, his fur prickling slightly. A dusty brown cat appeared from the shadows of the murky cave, glowing moss clinging to walls and shining down on his fur, reflecting off of it as he neared the other tom.

"How many clans do you think will be made from them?" The brown tom asked curiously, settling down next to the black tabby as he stroked the water with a forepaw. The black tom twitched an ear, concentrating on the swirling pool.

"Around five." He meowed plainly, his tail flicking across the brown cat's shoulder to catch his attention. "Springedjoint, look." Springedjoint, the brown tom, peered over the black tabby's shoulder, his eyes lighting up. As he placed a paw forward so he could lean closer to the water, stars bounced into the air before vanishing like dust.

"The territories are beautiful." He breathed in awe, his yellow eyes glittering in the darkness of the cave.

"It is. Isn't it?" The tabby said with a soft smile. The two went quiet, silence stretching onwards for a few long moments, before Springedjoint finally broke the silence with a soft meow.

"Darkblaze?" He questioned, tilting his head towards the black tom. "What do you think would've happened if we were still alive?" Darkblaze's whiskers twitched lightly, a look of unhappiness shadowing his gaze. He opened his mouth to say something, but closed it once again, his brow furrowing.

"I don't know."

Springedjoint let out a long sigh at his brother's response, his head lowering to the pool of swirling water. He lapped up a mouthful, the water tasting sweeter than normal water, and quickly quenching

the small bit of thirst that parched his throat. Darkblaze lowered himself next to his brother, his mouth parting to speak words of comfort, but unable to think of any.

The brown cat straightened himself once again, hunched a little bit in his sitting position, and Darkblaze rose with him. The black tabby's amber eyes flickered to the starlit pool, his mouth suddenly dry as he forced out a few words, thinking carefully of what he should say. "I believe it was our destiny to die." He said quietly. "We were meant to guide these cats to a better life. They needed us. *StarClan* needed us. Even if we are dead, we can still find happiness in these cats, watch them do what both you and I wished to have done before Pebblewing had stripped us of our lives."

Springedjoint breathed a long sigh, casting his gaze to the ground. "I suppose that's right." He mewed, the tip of his tail barely twitching.

Darkblaze blinked at his brother. However hard Springedjoint would try to hide it, Darkblaze still could tell he was frustrated. Gathering himself to his paws, Darkblaze slipped around the edge of the swirling pool, sitting back down beside the brown cat.

He leaned against his brother, their fur brushing. "I know how much you wish you were still alive." Darkblaze murmured, his amber eyes closing. "I know how it feels. I wish we never died. I wish we could still feel the warmth of the sun, still be in contact with the clans, even if we did want to leave." The tabby's voice was soft upon the still air, comforting and warm. Springedjoint self-consciously nodded, his muscles loosening.

"Yeah." He breathed sadly. "Living is far more preferable than the captivity in this spiritual life. But we can't change the past."

Slowly, the brown tom rose to his paws. Darkblaze blinked at him, his brow creasing together in a concerned frown. Springedjoint turned from his brother, and padded back into the shadows of the cave, his fur glittering in the glow of the moss, before fading into darkness. A sigh came from Darkblaze as he watched Springedjoint leave, wishing he had the right words to comfort him.

He caught the glimpse of white and gold patched fur out of the corner of his eyes, and turned to speak to the feline. Before he could do so, she vanished into the shadows of the cave, her tail swishing with stars swirling into the air.

Swallowing back the guilt that threatened to choke him, the black tabby turned back to the swirling pool of water. He touched his nose to it, and stars spiraled into the air, churning around him for a moment before he vanished, falling into the water without a splash to visit some cat in her dreams.

Allegiances

ThunderClan

Leader:

Pebblestar – gray tom with darker spotted markings and narrow yellow eyes

Deputy:

Mosspounce – gray and white tom with amber eyes

Apprentice: Splinterpaw

Medicine Cats:

Leopardstalk – small dark gray tom with darker leopard-like markings, green eyes

Twigpool – silver tom with gray markings, light blue eyes

Warriors: *(Toms, and she-cats without kits)*

Quietwish – small tortoiseshell she-cat with yellowish-green eyes

Firesplash – dark ginger she-cat, green eyes

Yellowtuft – cream-yellow tom with white tabby markings, greenish-brown eyes

Apprentice: Beetlepaw

Willowbush – pale ginger she-cat with a white tipped tail and markings, brown eyes

Oaktail – brown tabby tom with a lighter underbelly, yellow eyes

Redspark – reddish-brown tom with black tabby stripes and a white-tipped tail, orange-brown eyes

Ravenheart – black she-cat with white markings, forest green eyes

Lilystripe – yellow she-cat with pale brown tabby stripes and spots, amber eyes

Tortoisefoot – black tom with a brown tabby tail and markings, light amber eyes

Leaningwhisker – pale brown she-cat with a twisted foot and black markings, pale green eyes

Marigoldstreak – young brown she-cat with black spots, and strikingly amber eyes

Slopefall – young blue-gray tom with silver lining his muzzle and stomach, blue eyes

Queens: *(she-cats expecting or nursing kits)*

Shimmerbranch – white and silver she-cat *(Mother to Paleclaw's kits; Patchkit, Heronkit, and Gorsekit)*

Apprentices: *(kits older than six moons, in training to become warriors)*

Splinterpaw – pale white tom-kit with a brown back and red tabby markings, one pale green eye, and one orange eye

Beetlepaw – small black tom-kit with brown markings, amber eyes

Kits:

Patchkit – white and black patched tom-kit

Heronkit – silver tabby tom-kit with black ear tips and paw tips, yellowish orange eyes

Gorsekit – small yellow tabby she-kit with a white stomach and forepaw, green eyes

Cats Outside the Clans:
(This list only consists of the main characters, whom are all outside the

clans. More cats will be added in future books.)

Snowdrift – white tom with blue eyes *(formerly of ThunderClan)*

Streamflower – beautiful pale gray she-cat with darker gray markings, and honey yellow eyes *(formerly of ThunderClan)*

Miley – thick furred reddish tabby she-cat with a lighter stomach and brown eyes *(former kittypet)*

Harvey – dusty brown tom with a lighter underbelly and amber eyes *(former kittypet)*

Shade – black and white tom with amber eyes

Mouse – white and brown tom-kit with yellow eyes

Mist – light gray dappled she-cat with silvery blue eyes

Chapter One

[image]

Snow had begun swirling down into the woods, prickling at the tips of Miley's fur. Harvey anxiously bushed out his fur, his fur raising and lowering constantly against the chilly wind. Shade pushed ahead of them, his black and white pelt on end and his ears twitching irritably.

A sharp wind whisked through the trees, battering at Miley's flank as she forced her way forward.

"Shade!" The red tabby yowled over the whistling wind, the strength of her voice carried away through screeching blows of the breeze.

The black and white feline stopped in his tracks, turning around and squinting against the flakes of snow that whipped at his face to meet with Miley's desperate gaze. The red tabby had pressed herself against Harvey's side, for the brown tom had begun to stagger weakly.

"Shade, we have to take shelter! Harvey can't make it in this weather — and neither can I! We're not used to this!" Miley yowled, fear prickling at her skin from beneath her thick coat of fur. She could feel Harvey's shivers through his pelt brushing against hers, and his fear scent was strong over the smell of frozen water.

Shade stared disapprovingly into Miley's eyes, and for a moment Miley thought that he would object to her requests and force them to keep moving. She parted her jaws to make a retort, her brow furrowing as she was ready to leave him in the dust to find shelter.

"You're right." Shade hissed back, taking Miley by surprise. He began padding back in Miley's direction, where Harvey was just about sleeping on his feet, ready to collapse if not for Miley allowing him to lean on her for support. The black and white tom snapped his jaws around the brown cat's scruff, and began to haul

the tom through the snow, Harvey half walking and half being dragged before collapsing entirely in Shade's grasp.

Miley uncertainly followed behind, feeling harsh currents of snow lash at her face, nearly blinding her. She almost couldn't follow Shade and Harvey through the blinding snow, their scents fading nearly instantaneously.

The red tabby hurried up, her heart skipping a beat as she lost the two cats in the snow.

"Shade! Harvey!" She cried, her voice whipped away like a leaf. Miley squinted as her eyes were cascaded with snowflakes, and she could just barely make out a black figure, trudging through the snow back in her direction.

Shade stomped towards her, clearly struggling to stay on his paws. He clasped his jaws around her scruff, and half dragged her away as he did with Harvey. *I'm not helpless!* Miley thought sharply, scrabbling for a hold on the ground so she could haul herself to her paws. But with the force of the wind blowing against her and Shade practically dragging her, she couldn't find her footing.

In the midst of her struggles, the blizzard around her dissipated, the wind fading into nothing but distant howls, and the snow ceasing to a slight drift. Shade dropped her scruff, and she crumpled to the ground. Shakily finding her paws, the red tabby rose to her feet, shaking out her fur which was clumped together with snow.

After a few moments of bushing up her fur and flattening herself against the ground, the red tabby finally spoke. "How did you find this?" She meowed, looking around the small tunnel Shade had discovered.

The black and white tom shook out his fur as well, letting out a small huff. "I just stumbled into it when I realized you weren't with us." He growled, not meeting the she-cat's gaze.

His lip curled slightly as he stared at the soil covered floor, and he scraped a paw against it. "I think this was once a rabbit's burrow," he admitted, before continuing onward with his observation.

"There's a small stream somewhere further along. I think water may have hollowed this burrow, which is why it can fit us."

Miley tipped her head to the side. "That's cool." She meowed with a swish of her tail. "When do you think the storm will pass?"

Shade shrugged, casting a glance to a bundle of soaked, brown fur. Worry squirmed in the pits of Miley's stomach as she stared at her friend's limp form. "Hopefully that one wakes up by the time it's done." Shade commented, letting out a wry chuckle and giving his head a small shake. "But I honestly don't know. Maybe one or two sunrises?"

The tom puffed out a sigh, casting his gaze towards the ground. "Anyways, you'd better get some rest." After a few moments, he scoffed and lifted his amber eyes. "A kittypet like you and your friend mustn't be used to traveling so much." He said bitterly, swiping his tail.

"He has a name, you know!" Miley snapped irritably, her brown eyes flashing with anger.

Shade rolled his eyes, flopping onto his side, his head resting on his paws. "Whatever." He muttered.

Miley wrinkled her nose in frustration, biting back an angry hiss. With a reluctant roll of her eyes, she too lay down, curling her tail over her paws. The moment she had settled down onto the gritty earth, the red feline realized just how tired she was. With drooping eyes, she felt herself succumb to the dark embrace of sleep, her fur prickling at the cool air whisking around her.

Chapter Two

[image]

Snowdrift slowly awoke, glittering sunlight shining down on him through a crevice above. Blinking his blue eyes against the blinding glow, he took in his surroundings, snow spraying from his head as he lifted it.

Where am I? The white tom thought in alarm, leaping to his paws and scattering snow from his pelt. He glanced around frantically, his gaze resting on Streamflower's curled form. Before he could ponder any further, memories came pouring back into his mind like a waterfall, and with a relieved sigh he sank to his belly. He and his mate had ventured off on a journey to find the brightest star. It had been nearly half a moon since they had set out on their travels, and the previous night a vicious blizzard had struck. He and Streamflower had been forced to take cover in a shallow ravine to remain from freezing to death, but it had only provided a small amount of shelter against the blistering wind and raging snowfall.

Snowdrift gave a shake of his head, huffing a sigh. Glancing back down at Streamflower's sleeping form, he touched his nose to her forehead. Crouching down and fixing his gaze to the blinding sky outside, the white tom pounce into the air, his paws scrabbling against the ledge before he hauled himself out of the shallow ravine, shaking scraps of snow and dirt from his bright fur.

Emerging into the snowy landscape, the white tom let his gaze scan over the frosted ground, trying to decide where the best place to hunt would be. The positive side to no longer living in a clan was that he didn't have to worry about caring for twenty other cats. It was just him and Streamflower.

But that doesn't dismiss the fact that I miss them. He thought to himself, his head bowed for a brief moment. A few faces flashed across his memory, and he gave a bitter smile, but his heart cracked and his face fell as he remembered Littleshine's lifeless body, crumpled and bloody in a hollow of jagged rocks.

With a pang of regret coursing through his veins, Snowdrift gave his fur a brisk shake. The white feline lifted his head and tasted the air for prey. The strong scent of frozen water bit at his nose, like hundreds of little needles stabbing at it. Along with the smell came a warm gust of wind, signaling the near end to leafbare. Wrinkling his muzzle with a small sneeze, he detected a squirrel further along, and prowling forward he tried to pinpoint the scent.

As he searched for the animal, a sparrow darted across his path in midflight. Before the bird could soar out of reach, Snowdrift reared onto his hindlegs and swiped it out of the air, its terrified cry filling the former warrior's ears. Flattening his ears against his head, he dragged down the bird and dispatched it with a firm bite around the neck, its wings battering at his face crumpling and growing lifelessly still.

Panting, Snowdrift dropped the bird to the ground and licked some blood from his face. The bird was scrawny and feathery, not much meat on its bones but enough to fill a cat's belly for a few hours.

I'll give this to Streamflower. Snowdrift told himself, crouching to the ground to dig a small hole. Once done, a shallow dip gaped ahead of him, and the tom dropped the sparrow inside before kicking soil over it. Turning back to the squirrel trail, he snuck along with his fur smoothed along his spine. The only part of him that stood out in the snow was his blue eyes, sharp and intent on finding his prey.

He spotted the squirrel only moments later, it's head high and alert. An acorn hung loosely in one of its tiny claws, a small hole gaping in the ground ahead of it where it had scraped relentlessly for the small morsel of food. It's breathing was quick and rapid, it's head bobbing with every breath. It's tail twitched sharply, and it lowered itself to all fours. It abandoned the acorn on the pure white snow, ready to make a bolt for the trees.

Just a little further. Snowdrift thought determinedly, his heart beginning to race as his haunches stiffened with strain. The snap of a twig behind Snowdrift quickly alerted the rodent, and with panic-stricken eyes it darted towards the cover of a tree.

Snowdrift growled in frustration, his blue eyes sharp with anger as

he bolted after his prey. He was faster than it, but it had already gotten a head start. Scrabbling at the trunk of an oak tree, the squirrel bounded up it, out of Snowdrift's reach. Staring down at him with narrowed beady eyes, the squirrel chattered angrily.

Lashing his tail, Snowdrift looked up at the squirrel. "I can't believe it." He growled to himself, shooting a look to where he had been crouching before. Padding back to investigate what had snapped the twig, he sniffed along the snow covered ground, the icy liquid crunching beneath his paws.

The faint smell of cat could be traced among the snow, and a small growl rose in Snowdrift's throat as he followed it to where he had buried his sparrow. Before him lay a scattered hole, and inside there was no sign of the freshkill.

Wrinkling his nose, he lowered his head to the ground and sniffed around the uncovered hole. Certain that a cat had stolen his catch, he turned and trudged back to his temporary den, shoulders hunched and head low, with his tail trailing discouragingly along the ground.

Leaping down into the shallow ravine, the white tom landed with a small thump. Casting his gaze along, he realized that Streamflower's nest was empty.

She must've gone hunting as well. Snowdrift thought to himself, huffing a sigh. He flopped to the ground and rested his head on his paws, disappointment visible in his flattened ears. *What kind of a mate am I, not gathering enough food to provide for the two of us?*

He looked up at the sky through the crevice above, sunlight beaming down on him. They would have to set off in their travels soon. Growing worried, he rose to his paws once again and pounced out of the hollow, scrabbling at the ledge as he quickly hauled himself up.

Tracking his mate's scent, he followed Streamflower's trail before discovering her crouched amongst the snow. Not wishing to disturb her, Snowdrift sat down at a distance, seeing that she was tracking a squirrel.

The gray she-cat crept forward. Her ears were pricked with concentration, and she placed her paws delicately against the snow laden ground. She moved at a slow and steady pace, stalking from upwind of the prey. At a well-measured distance, Streamflower darted forward with a small yowl, slamming her paws down on the squirrel before it could move as much as a whisker. The prey was dead within moments, clamped tightly between her jaws and growing quickly limp.

Unable to contain his pride, Snowdrift rumbled a small purr. "That catch was outstanding!" He commented, rising to his paws and trotting over to the gray she-cat. He gently butted his head against her shoulder, and dropping her squirrel Streamflower smiled back.

"Thank you, Snowdrift." She replied, her mew soft and full of affection. "What happened to your catch? Surely you would've caught something after being away for so long."

Snowdrift's happy mood faltered for an instant, and Streamflower immediately took notice as a frown creased across her features.

"Some rogue stole my freshkill." He growled, his eyes narrowing. "I was about to catch a squirrel, too, when they decided to carelessly stomp around! They were like a badger."

Streamflower let out a small laugh, and Snowdrift shot her a puzzled glance.

"I'm sure they smelt like one, too. Luckily for us, I caught this," she prodded at her squirrel, which seemed quite rounded. "And it's ought to be *far* better than something you'd have caught."

Teasingly, she stuck her muzzle into the air. Snowdrift let out a mock growl, and launched himself into her, knocking her to the ground in a spray of snow. Yowling in surprise, she batted him away, and the two took off across the snow in pursuit of the other.

Snatching the squirrel, Snowdrift raced into a small cluster of trees, hiding in a bush while Streamflower streaked past him. Grinning to himself, he watched as she looked carelessly around. He was sure they'd scared off all the prey from there back to the lake, but he

didn't care.

Placing the squirrel silently against the ground, Snowdrift wriggled his haunches. Streamflower was steadily growing closer, her honey yellow eyes flashing with a kitlike excitement, and her tail held high behind her.

Gathering his muscles, Snowdrift exploded from the bush, the crusted remains of leaves shattering in the air as he slammed into Streamflower's side, knocking the she-cat to the snowy ground. Spluttering as mouthfuls of snow was rammed into her mouth, Streamflower shoved Snowdrift away, who reared to his hind legs with an amused *mrrow.*

"I gotcha!" He trilled triumphantly, settling back down into a sitting position. Streamflower wrinkled her nose at him, forcing herself a frown.

"Mouse-heart." She grumbled, a purr hinted in her mew.

Snowdrift padded back around and grabbed Streamflower's squirrel, dropping it at his mate's paws. "You have the first bite." Snowdrift offered, blinking at Streamflower with kind blue eyes.

Streamflower snorted, shoving the squirrel back in the white tom's direction. "No, you should have the first bite." She insisted. "*I* caught it, so you can eat some before I do."

Snowdrift quirked his brow. "And where's the sense in that?" He meowed.

Streamflower shrugged. "I don't know, and I don't care. If you don't eat, I won't eat."

Snowdrift opened his mouth to object, but thought better of it and bowed down, tearing a strip of meat off the squirrel. Swiping his tongue across his jaws, he blinked teasingly up at Streamflower.

"There you go. Are you happy?" He rumbled. Streamflower's whiskers quivered thoughtfully.

"I suppose I am."

She crouched down next to Snowdrift, and the two shared the rabbit, their affectionate gazes full of content.

Chapter Three

[image]

Mouse cautiously placed his paw into the snow, the solidified liquid breaking beneath his paws as his legs sank towards the ground, touching the buried grass. He shivered as the snow reached up to his belly fur, and the tufts of hair along his spine stood on end. Feebly, he tried pulling himself out of the cold material, but it spilt down into the small hole he had made instead. "M-Mist!" He mewled, and on cue to his cries his mother scooped him out from the snow and carefully pulled him close.

She licked the fur between his ears in a comforting manner, her tail swishing from side to side. "Mouse, let me lead." She murmured, gently nosing the kit to the side. Her blue gaze flickered upwards as she tried to peer past the thick foliage of leaves, only to discover cloudy night skies beyond the forest canopy. Her tail twitched in betrayal to her annoyance, and Mouse followed her gaze, only to replicate her disappointment with a small frown.

"Mist? Where's the brightest star?" The tom-kit meowed, his muzzle crinkled in a minor sign of concern as the scarce moonlight dappled his already patched fur.

Mist shook out her pelt, advancing forward in slow, steadied steps. "It's this way." She assured Mouse, however her uncertainty wavered in her voice. Doubtfully, Mouse followed in her pawsteps, placing his small feet into the crevices left by Mist's footprints.

"Are you sure?" He questioned.

Mist twitched an ear in annoyance, grinding her teeth harshly together in desperation to remain calm. She regarded her kit with a strained look, a mixture between a frown and semi-reassuring smile. "Yes." She replied firmly, her large tail swiping from side to side as she trudged through the snow without waiting for a further response. Dutifully, Mouse continued onwards behind his mother, his muzzle lowered close to the ground. Something cold and wet

landed on the back of his head, and with a yelp Mouse pawed it away, scraping a forepaw across his head. He glanced up to see whatever it was, and was met with millions of snowflakes drifting down from the cloudy sky. His jaw parted in awe as he lowered his head and let his gaze wander, watching as snow dappled through the air and further covered the forest.

"Mouse!" Came a shout from ahead. Realizing that he had stopped walking, he scrabbled after his mother, tumbling through the holes in the ground she had made with each pawstep.

Mouse soon caught up to her, his tiny frame shivering as he pressed close to his mother. "Are we going to find shelter soon?" He mewed, turning his head to look at her with wide yellow eyes. Mist dismissively flicked an ear, shrugging her shoulders.

"Soon." Was all she replied with, her blue eyes set forward and occasionally flicking to the concealed sky. Mouse trotted alongside her as snow lashed at his ears, its beauty turning aggressive. The young tom felt a lump rise in his throat.

"Mist, I'm tired." He murmured as he awkwardly stumbled over his own paws. Mist huffed a sigh, and slowed her steps until she was standing still. Wind howled around them like wolves, and Mouse quickly stepped closer to his mother, feeling like the torrents of wind would close around him, choking him.

Just like my dream. He could just recall the fog gushing into his lungs, and with a shiver he suppressed the memory. As if summoned, the wind picked up and snow closed in around the two, a violent blur of nearly white illuminated by shafts of moonlight that caved into the forest around the two felines.

Mist's blue eyes widened, and wrapping her tail around Mouse she trudged forward at a much quicker pace, guiding her kit's stumbling form alongside her. There was a sudden panic to her movements, sharp yet fluid as she forced herself along. Her front paw slithered down in the snow, and she involuntarily let out a yelp of surprise as an oddly large rabbit warren's entrance was revealed through crumbling snow and earth.

Without hesitation, Mist grabbed Mouse's scruff and hauled him into the tunnel. Mouse let out a startled yowl as he tumbled down, his limbs flailing for a hold in the soil walls. Glancing behind her with brief hesitance, Mist launched herself into the cool depths alongside her kit, a spray of snow and soil cascading around them.

The blinding white of the outside world vanished, darkness wrapping itself around the two.

Chapter Four

Miley awoke in the middle of the night.

The howls of wind outside could be deciphered through the muffling dirt walls, and a light coating of snow lined the floor further in the tunnel where the entrance resided. Snowflakes fluttered down and rested on top, gradually increasing the size of the white mound. A loud thump disturbed the nightly silence, and immediately set on alert Miley flicked her ears up as small grains of soil sprinkled down on her already matted fur.

Although Shade could be quite a nuisance, his survival lessons really came in handy. *Be wary and smart. If you hear something odd, determine whether it would be safe to investigate or not. Down in these tunnels, who knows what may lurk? You must act safely, and by that, I mean that you should seriously tell me if you hear something strange. You may be as annoying as dung, but I do not want a kittypet's death to be of my fault.* Shade's small advisory rang in Miley's mind from the night before, and she carefully maneuvered around Shade and Harvey's sleeping forms, and slipped into the darkness of the tunnel.

I don't need him to investigate for me! Miley thought determinedly, lifting her tail over her back in an arc. *I'll show him that being a "kittypet" does not make me weak.*

Though her resolute thoughts rang in her mind, she couldn't help but feel a flutter of anxiety as she padded along, making sure to remember her route back. A few sections of the tunnel dove to the side, but she kept going forward, towards a soft murmur in the still air. The former kittypet felt that something had come into the tunnel that wasn't there when she had fallen asleep, and she wanted to make sure it wouldn't endanger she or her friends.

She considered the thought for a moment. *Is Shade really counted as a friend?* She let out a small huff of amusement, and shook away the thought like a passing butterfly. Continuing onwards, a small woodland mouse skittered across her path. She resisted the urge to

kill the prey, earning a reluctant grumble from her stomach. It felt like she hadn't eaten in moons, but her companion's safety mattered more than food.

The ground began to gently slope downwards. The walls were still made of soil, but now were slightly less damp and more tightly packed together. Miley felt a little bit more at ease, knowing it was less likely the roof would cave in around her. Gradually the ground began to even out, a soft hum growing in the air around her and the tiniest gust of a nighttime breeze. Miley pinned back her ears and quickened her pace.

A few moments later, she saw what had disturbed her sleep. A gaping hole yawned in the ceiling above, a pile of rocks, soil, and snow dappled with moonlight. A cold chill ran over Miley's spine as a gust of wind howled through the hole above, and cautiously she peered over the rubble to look up. The hole was quite deep, crumbling around the edges and seemed to have collapsed.

That made Miley's unease crawl, and she realized that no matter how deep she was, her life was still endangered from the surrounding tunnels. Swallowing back the wish to return to the safety of her twoleg home, which was bound to be impossibly far by now, she raised her head and began to investigate.

The vague scent of cat tickled her nose, and she followed the trail, skirting the rubble as best as she could, her red fur brushing the earthy walls. Her whiskers quivered as she tasted the stale air, it was now sharp with cold and snow, but the scent of a fellow feline remained strong in her senses.

She then spotted the source of the scent. A crumpled bunch of bluish gray fur lay curled along the ground, the molly sound asleep, yet covering something with her arched back. Curiosity making the best of her, Miley crept forward. She kept herself low to the earth, her belly fur lightly brushing the soil. Her brown eyes flashed with surprise as her gaze settled upon what the blue-gray she-cat had attempted to cover.

A white and brown tom-kit could be distinguished through a spray of soil, laying soundly beside it's supposed mother. Stepping

forward to get a closer look, Miley's paw knocked into a small stone, sending it skittering forward and ominously disturbing the silent and stale night air. In less than an instant, the blue-gray she-cat had whipped herself to her paws, her back arched and a vicious snarl erupting from her jaws.

Miley quickly scrabbled backwards, surprise flashing across her features, before changing quickly to a crippling wave of fear.

"Stay away from my kit!" The feline screeched, lashing a claw forward and just barely missing Miley's eye, and instead scraping directly above the former kittypet's nose. Blood welled from the cut, and Miley let out a terrified yowl, ducking to the side as the she-cat swiped at her again.

"H-hey — Stop it!" Miley spluttered, backing herself inconveniently against the pile of rubble, which toppled away behind her.

The blue-gray she-cat lurched forward, her flanks heaving and lip curled with vicious intentions, expressing the fierce protectiveness of a mother. Her jaws snapped through empty air as Miley rolled to the side, fear pulsating through her fur. The attacking feline's kit now stood wide awake behind her, yellow eyes round. He appeared to be four moons old.

Miley pressed herself back against the rubble, but it wouldn't budge. "Please — I-I mean no harm!" She exclaimed desperately, her ears pinned against her skull.

The she-cat seemed to not hear her, a low growl rumbling fiercely in her throat, her bristling fur nowhere close to lying back down, and she steadily advanced towards Miley in a much slower pace, having realized that she had the red tabby trapped.

Miley realized quickly that she had made a foolish decision, going off to investigate on her own. Shade and Harvey would wake up in the morning, not know where she was, and leave. A sudden pang went through her heart, and she lowered her trembling form to a terrified crouch, coming to finally accept the fate she had brought upon herself.

This was where her journey would end.

Chapter Five

Fog hovered lightly above the ground, streams of sunlight trickling through the thick branches of a few elderly oak trees, and small buds of grass poked their green tips through the snow. The sun sat comfortably at its peak, and Snowdrift stirred under its warm light. Dew clung to the white tom's whiskers, and he quickly shook it away with a twitch of his nose.

Streamflower's makeshift nest was empty, a gentle scoop in the ground cold and empty from where she had rested. Rising from his own nest, Snowdrift felt a small gust of warm air brush against his fur in calling to the oncoming newleaf.

As the white tom slipped out from under the bush, he was met by the warm scent of freshly caught prey. His blue eyes swept the small clearing between the few trees that littered the rough terrain, and he found Streamflower's beautiful gray fur easily distinguishable against the blinding white of the snow.

"Good morning!" The former warrior purred, her voice laced with warmth. "I caught you some prey." She swept forward and butted her head gently against Snowdrift's.

Snowdrift smiled. "That's great! It seems you had quite the haul." he complimented with a glance at the stock of prey, a rabbit and two mice.

Streamflower bobbed her head. "I actually had to make two trips — no loss, though!" She added quickly, her muzzle wrinkled in a teasing smile.

Snowdrift laughed. "Splendid! I suppose the strange cat held some sort of grudge against me, and me only." He quirked his muzzle, earning a *mrrow* of amusement from Streamflower.

"Here, you can have the rabbit." She offered, nudging the large prey forward. "I caught it especially for you." Streamflower said quickly

before Snowdrift could interject.

With a small huff, he nodded. "Alright then. Thank you, Streamflower." he smiled at the she-cat, who returned the expression.

The two ate their share of food before heading on their way once again. Sunlight dappled the forest floor, and time gradually slipped by, the cool air of night gently settling upon them. A small storm rumbled on the horizon with a few flickers of lightning striking like snakes through the clouds.

"How can you be so certain this is the right direction of the brightest star?" Streamflower asked lightheartedly, flicking her tail against Snowdrift's shoulder as the sun's evening light shone against their pelts.

The white tom shrugged, pausing for a moment. "I'm not sure. I just feel this — tug, you know? Like StarClan is calling me forward in this direction." Snowdrift's whiskers quivered as the scent of fresh rain touched his nose. There would certainly be some snow melt after this storm.

Streamflower gave a small, slow nod. "I've never been summoned by StarClan before, so I'm not entirely sure if I'd know what it's like." she purred in amusement, earning herself a small chuckle from Snowdrift. "But I think I understand what you mean."

"That's nice." Snowdrift breathed. "How about you go on ahead and rest? It's about time we found a place to sleep for the night." He inclined his head to the sky, where the sun had begun to set and the storm he had seen was beginning to set in.

Streamflower smiled. "Are you sure you can handle some prey on your own?" She joked. "Wouldn't want anymore food running off after it was caught."

Snowdrift barked a laugh. "I'm sure I'll be fine, Streamflower." He purred, touching his nose to hers. "But thanks for the concern."

Streamflower grinned, quirking back her head. "Anytime,

Snowdrift."

Snowdrift smiled, and watched as with a flick of her large tail, Streamflower vanished into the undergrowth. He'd follow her scent trail when he got back from hunting.

Padding off into the snow, the white tom searched for prey, accidentally inhaling a few clumps of snow. Sneezing out the freezing liquid, Snowdrift advanced further on, nearing the sound of rumbling water. The terrain gradually smoothed itself out, and the forests thinned ever more. Scent of a snow hare could be detected along the rise of the slope ahead of him, and the white tom stalked forward. A gorge could be heard over the rise, and Snowdrift took a mental note to keep a safe distance away from the aggressive water. Suddenly, the white hare's head whipped up, it's beady eyes round with fear.

To Snowdrift's surprise, the hare raced in his direction rather than away. The tom outstretched his claws, bracing himself for the kill, when a shape rose up behind the hare.

Frozen with shock, Snowdrift felt the hare undoubtedly dart past him in a blur of white. With a streak of gray, Snowdrift was tackled to the ground, claws tearing into his skin and ripping out clumps of fur. A yowl escaped from Snowdrift's throat as the feline pinned him down, green eyes ignited with fury and claws raking down Snowdrift's stomach.

Scrabbling to escape the feline's vicious claws, Snowdrift finally managed to roll out from beneath them, a small spray of blood hitting the snow. Panting in desperate attempt to catch his breath, Snowdrift thrust a blow across the cat's muzzle. The opposing feline spat furiously, and latched its jaws around Snowdrift's ankle.

With an agonized yowl, Snowdrift raised a paw and struck the tom's head. Dazed, the gray tom staggered back, his green eyes foggy for a few moments before clearing in reflection of the sunset sky. Thunder rumbled ominously throughout the air, and Snowdrift took the moment to identify the feline. To his shock, he realized that he recognized the tom.

"Mosspounce?" Snowdrift gasped, voice strained with shock and horror as he took a shaky step back. "What in the name of StarClan are you doing here?"

Chapter Six

Mosspounce's lip was curled back and his teeth were bared. His eyes showed not a sliver of surprise or shock at finding Snowdrift, but instead contempt and murderous intent. Uncertainty welled up inside of the white tom, and he took an uneasy pace back.

"I'm here to end the treachery and betrayal you have brought upon ThunderClan. You're a coward!" Mosspounce's last words were filled with rage for battle, and in less than an instant he had Snowdrift writhing beneath his unsheathed claws.

"Mosspounce! Get — off!" Snowdrift snarled, kicking up his hindlegs against Mosspounce's stomach, struggling to not tear open his soft belly flesh, but unsheathing his claws enough to draw blood.

Mosspounce howled, and hooked a claw through the air and slicing open Snowdrift's cheek. Letting out a screech of pain, the white tom finally managed to kick his opponent off of him, heaving for breath. Rearing onto his hindlegs, he performed a quick double swipe, managing to nick Mosspounce's ear and tear open the tip of his nose.

Snowdrift dropped onto all fours, his eyes slitting as the battle tactics from his training swept like a wave through his mind. As Mosspounce spun back around to face Snowdrift again, the white tom latched his teeth around Mosspounce's tail and gave a tug, in return earning a furious slash of claws across his shoulder. Mosspounce's claws remained gripped tightly on Snowdrift's shoulders, and the white tom struggled to throw him off. Dropping to the ground, Snowdrift's quick absence in his struggles caught his opponent off guard and he managed to quickly slip away into undisturbed snow.

Heaving for breath, Snowdrift's muscles already seemed to ache. Mosspounce as well was taking a moment to catch his breath, swiping the blood away from his muzzle with a rasp of his tongue. A moment of silence hung over the clearing, the rumbling sound of

thunder above them and the roar of the gorge just beyond the rise disturbed the still air.

The silence lasted for only a moment, for Mosspounce launched himself towards the still exhausted Snowdrift. Bracing for impact, Snowdrift arched his back and stiffened his muscles, hissing furiously and squinting his vulnerable eyes.

But the expected pain never came.

A shriek of fury erupted through the air, and in an explosion of bracken and debris Streamflower burst into the clearing, flinging herself and barricading Snowdrift behind her arched form. Mosspounce flew through the air, and was unconditionally locked into battle with his sister rather than his target in less than an instant. The littermates fell into a writhing ball of white and gray, hisses and snarls breaking through the air as they lashed out at eachother in a vicious attack.

Lightning struck the ground only tail-lengths away, resulting in an earsplitting crash. The siblings broke away from each other with matted pelts, and began to pace around, eyeing the other with studying gazes.

"He's corrupting you, Streamflower." Mosspounce growled breathlessly. "Why do you help him?"

Streamflower barked a bitter laugh, her faded tail lashing against the snow. "What in StarClan's name are you talking about? If anything, Pebblestar has been corrupting *you*." She meowed, her eyes slitting to a small glare. "You just tried to murder my mate. And why? Just because you had a few skirmishes in the past, back when you were *apprentices.* For StarClan's sake, get ahold of yourself!"

Mosspounce growled, his claws sinking furiously into the ground. "You don't understand, Streamflower!" He yowled. "I hate him! He betrayed me. He left me in the dust." Tears were welling up in the gray tom's eyes, and from his weakened position in the snow, Snowdrift's brow furrowed in confusion.

What could I have done to cause him to think that? He wondered, crouching even closer to the ground. He felt so tired, he just wanted to sleep forever. However much he felt like closing his heavy eyelids, Snowdrift kept them open.

"He left our clan, and now he has to pay for betraying not only me, but all of ThunderClan." His last words were barely even a breath, and with a screech he shoved past Streamflower and grappled his claws around Snowdrift, tackling him mercilessly to the ground.

The two toms rolled in earth and snow, their tumbling forms growing eerily close to the gorge as the lightning above increased to nearly constant flashes and roars. Snowdrift battered Mosspounce's face with unsheathed claws, now fighting for his life as the gray tom struggled to latch his teeth around Snowdrift's throat to deliver the killing blow. The white feline cried out as Mosspounce managed to tear out a large clump of bloodied fur, and his stunned mate finally gathered her bearings.

Hauling Mosspounce away from Snowdrift, Streamflower reared onto her hind legs in perfect symphony with her littermate. Her claws lashed out and she hooked one right above his eye, holding him writhing in place as he struggled to swipe at her with both paws. The two dropped to all fours, and Snowdrift scrabbled to his paws. Pressing his flank against Streamflower's the two began swiping at Mosspounce in perfect sync, driving him steadily towards the raging gorge. Snowdrift knew Streamflower didn't intend to shove the opposing tom off the edge, but rather force a surrender.

Mosspounce clearly didn't know that was the case, and was growing antsy as he backed further away from the duo's thorn sharp, never ending torrent of claws.

"Would you really — kill your own brother — for such a flea-pelt?" Mosspounce hissed between dodges. He was now in desperation to defend himself, but nowhere near dissipating his greed to end Snowdrift's life.

The three now stood on a ledge. A downpour of rain began to pound around them, slicking back their fur and drenching into the

snow, making it a slick, slippery slush. Mosspounce was warily eyeing Snowdrift and Streamflower, his lip peeled back and baring his teeth.

Streamflower took a step forward, staring calmly into her brother's eyes. "Mosspounce. Stop attacking Snowdrift. He did nothing wrong, and does not deserve this." She murmured, her golden eyes glittering in the light of a lightning strike.

Mosspounce froze for a moment, meeting his green gaze to hers.

"I can't."

He lurched forward once again, claws outstretched towards Snowdrift. The white tom's fur bushed out and he arched his back, taking a quick step to the side and quickly averting the gray tom's attack. Mosspounce fell to the ground behind the mates, quickly scrabbling to his feet and staring them down with narrowed eyes. Streamflower let out a yowl of fury.

Snowdrift and Streamflower were now the ones backed against the ledge. Mosspounce had gained the upper paw. Mosspounce had realized the shift in their situation, and grinned. There was no stopping him now. He leaped forward with all his might, claws raised in the air and his teeth bared against the whistling rain, he was set on his target, and Snowdrift knew that there was no way he could escape his death. Just as he expected Mosspounce to reach him and tear out his throat, a gray form surged in front of him, buckling under Mosspounce's momentum and skidding on the slippery ground.

Mosspounce rolled with Streamflower for a few moments, before quickly scrabbling to his paws and leaping away from the edge. Streamflower, however, continued slipping as the ground began to slope downwards towards the ledge. She desperately writhed her paws against the loose snow, but it was too wet. Her golden eyes were wide with terror, and she let out a pitiful cry as the ground lurched beneath her.

"Help!" She screeched, still finding no hold on the snow.

Snowdrift lurched forward, his heart nearly stopping. He scrambled along the slope, trying to find a way down without falling.

But he was too late.

The ground gave way beneath Streamflower's paws, and with a mortified screech she plummeted down into the raging gorge. Her paws churned in the air and her cry for help dissipated as she crashed into the water, swallowed whole by the raging current.

Chapter Seven

Mouse's heart raced like a downpour of rain. Mist's back was arched with fury, and although he could see the pain in her movements, she showed no hesitance to attack.

No hesitance to kill.

Mist had the strange she-cat trapped against the rubble she and Mouse had fitfully escaped from. Mouse's brown dappled fur was smudged with a smear of blood, and plenty of tiny, yet fresh scratches from the crumbling fall.

"Please! I meant no harm!" the red tabby cried, her voice strained with desperation. She had herself pressed firmly to the ground, trembling with fear and wide-eyed. Mist still advanced with full-blown aggression, and the red she-cat's hope vanished from her brown eyes.

The strange feline stilled, her eyes squeezing shut as she accepted her fate. Mouse's muscles bunched together, ready to spring forward and stop Mist. What she was doing was *wrong.*

Before he could so much as take a step forward, a tom exploded from behind the rubble, a vicious snarl rising from his throat. He violently rammed himself into Mist's side, sending her staggering to the wall with a yowl of surprise. Her gray fur came in brutal contact with the hardened dirt, and a dark, rusty color began to spread through her side.

Snapping her head in the black and white tom's direction, she charged forward with her jaws agape. She snapped her fangs around his
shoulder, barely missing his neck, and her teeth sank through his fur and buried into his skin. The black and white tom let out an agonized yowl, rearing onto his hindlegs and slamming himself against the wall, bringing Mist's head with the impact. Stunned, she released her solid grip and staggered for a moment.

The black and white tom took advantage of her dazed instant, and charged at her, raking his claws across both her shoulders and tackling her to the ground in a haze of blue-gray and black. Mist's blue eyes flashed with defiance, and she writhed viciously, raking her claws against his stomach with pure fury. Mouse backed away, eyes wide with fear as the tom kept his mother pinned.

The red tabby Mist attacked had finally come to her senses, staggering to her shaky paws and watching the battle with awestricken surprise. A brown tom could be seen hidden behind the rubble, peeking over it with shocked amber eyes. Finally, the black and white tom unhooked his claws from Mist's fur. She had stopped attacking, laying eerily still against the floor. Mouse, unable to help himself, darted forward with fear rising through his fur.

"Mist!" He cried, streaking across the tunnel. The black and white tom's hard gaze flashed in the kit's direction, and he moved forward to stop him. The red tabby rushed forward, growling to the black and white tom.

"He's just a kit! Don't you dare hurt him." She snapped, her brown eyes flashing fiercely.

The black and white tom's eyes narrowed coldly. "What did I tell you about investigating things, Miley?" He snarled, however not taking another step in Mouse's direction. "If it weren't for me, you would've been killed!"

The red tabby — Miley, flinched away. She clamped her mouth shut, casting away her gaze. Mouse huddled against his mother, sniffing her fur. "Mist?" He whispered quietly, his heart beginning to race.

The dusty brown tom crept from behind the rubble, eyes wide like twin amber moons. "Did...did you kill her?" He murmured, his gaze settling on Mouse's tiny figure against Mist's blue-gray fur.

The black and white tom whipped his head around to the brown cat, his lip curled back. "What do you think I am, a murderer?" He snapped. "No, of course I didn't kill her." He retorted once he saw the dusty brown tom's wary gaze.

Visibly, the tom relaxed, and Miley came up to touch her nose reassuringly to his. "Don't worry, Harvey. I wouldn't bring you along with a killer!" She reassured with a light-hearted tone, yet relief could be seen in her sagging shoulders.

The black and white tom turned away from the two, scorn and an emotion indecipherable to Mouse drawn across the tom's face. He stalked over to Mist, and Mouse quickly slid backwards, eyeing the tom with fearful eyes. He regarded Mouse with a roll of his eyes, and lowered his head to sniff Mist's fur.

"She's out cold." He announced, his tail whipping against the ground. Mouse watched as he backed away, turning his gaze firmly to the kit. Mouse shrank under the tom's cold amber gaze.

"I'm Shade." He meowed calmly, taking the kit by surprise. Mouse stared up at Shade, not moving an inch. "Sorry about your mother." He continued, glancing at Mist's limp form. "She attacked that kittypet back there, and I can't afford to allow somebody to die under my watch."

He huffed scornfully, yet a small glitter of admiration appeared in his eyes. "We'll stay with you until she wakes up. But if she attacks again, I will *not* hesitate to kill her. Do you understand?" There was a cold certainty to Shade's amber eyes as he stared down at Mouse, awaiting an answer from the young tom.

Mouse swallowed nervously, his tail wrapped around himself. "O-Okay." He managed to say, unable to contain the small tremors of fear that rippled through his pelt.

Shade briskly nodded, and padded away from Mouse to speak to the others. Mouse watched with wide, wary eyes. Odd scents billowed from Miley and Harvey, masked by the smell of snow. But from Shade, the familiar scent of forest tickled his nose. Breathing a small, uncertain sigh, the tom-kit placed his chin against his paws and watched with round yellow eyes, until his eyelids drooped, and he slipped off into an uneasy slumber.